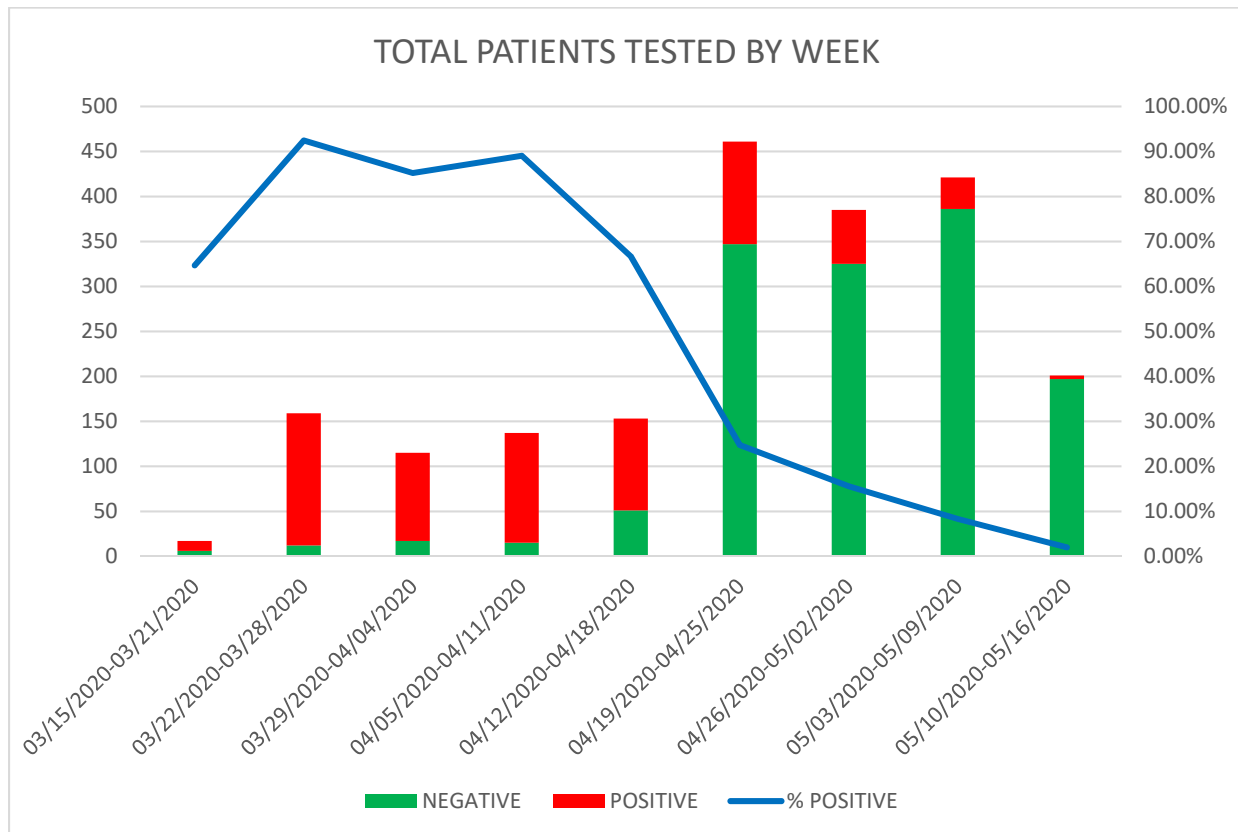


May 15, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Cook County Sheriff's Office and Cermak Health Services today announced a steady decrease in new COVID-19 cases at Cook County Jail over the last four weeks, a clear indication that the interventions implemented since January are working to mitigate the virus at this time. Notably, since May 8, the majority of new cases have been new detainees entering the jail from the community, not from those who were already in custody.

With enhanced testing that now includes symptomatic, asymptomatic, intake and surveillance testing, the positivity rate of those tested has gone from 97% in March to less than 10% today. These enhanced testing strategies, coupled with additional infection control, social distancing, housing, and isolation strategies will serve as a model for understanding and responding to this pandemic in both congregate and community settings.



"As information became available on the progression of the COVID-19 pandemic, our operations and focus shifted to enhancing current infection control processes and instituting specific interventions to mitigate its impact within our walls to protect our patients and our staff. We must remain vigilant but I am confident that partnership between Cermak and the Sheriff has altered the trajectory of this virus inside the jail," said Dr. Connie Mennella, Chair of Correctional Health, Cook County Health.

Interventions implemented over the past three months include opening and staffing unused divisions to facilitate physical distancing, and moving to convert every available cell to single-occupancy—which was enabled by the Cook County criminal justice stakeholders' efforts to reduce the population of the jail.

"As we watched this pandemic approach Cook County, we understood the potential impact it could have at the jail and worked with our public safety partners to release non-violent offenders. This was both the right thing to do for these individuals and the right thing to do to mitigate spread inside the jail. I applaud everyone's effort, particularly those of the Sheriff and our team at Cermak Health Services, who continue to provide the highest level of care under the most difficult of circumstances. Today's news is a testament to their commitment," said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle.

Other key interventions on which Cermak Health Services and the Sheriff's Office have been national leaders include quickly isolating symptomatic detainees, enhancing testing capacity, the use of rigorous infection control and sanitation practices, and limiting movement of both staff and detainees between different areas of the jail.

"Even before COVID-19 reached Chicago, we were looking for a plan that we could implement, but found none," Sheriff Thomas J. Dart said. "We had to put it together ourselves, working in close cooperation with the medical staff at Cermak Health Services, the Chicago Department of Public Health, and based on guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. We are proud of the successes we have had with our partners and believe the current downward trend in new cases among staff and detainees proves that our combined efforts have saved lives."

Indeed, a study published in the May 6, 2020 edition of the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report listed a host of best practices to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 in carceral facilities. The study republished many of the same guidelines that the agency has issued since March 23. In nearly every instance, DOC and Cermak interventions were implemented before the CDC's guidelines were issued, and in some cases exceeded them.

- Screening of incoming detainees began Jan. 24
- Jail staff implemented special receiving tiers on March 14 to allow Cermak staff to monitor them for symptoms before they were transferred to the general population; opened an off-site quarantine and isolation facility on March 16, and began medical isolation and quarantine on March 20
- Cermak began testing the first symptomatic detainees on March 20 immediately upon approval and availability of testing in a non-hospital setting
- Beginning on March 26, DOC staff began converting every available cell from double to single-occupancy to enhance social distancing strategies already. At this time, CDC has issued no guidelines on single-celling an entire jail population.

DOC and Cermak staff have also increased cleaning and sanitation efforts in all areas of the jail, beginning in January and in consultation with Harry Grenawitzke, an environmental health monitor and former Department of Justice monitor. Additionally, we continually educated staff and detainees on how to prevent transmission of the virus, and complied with CDC guidelines for PPE use by detainees and staff.

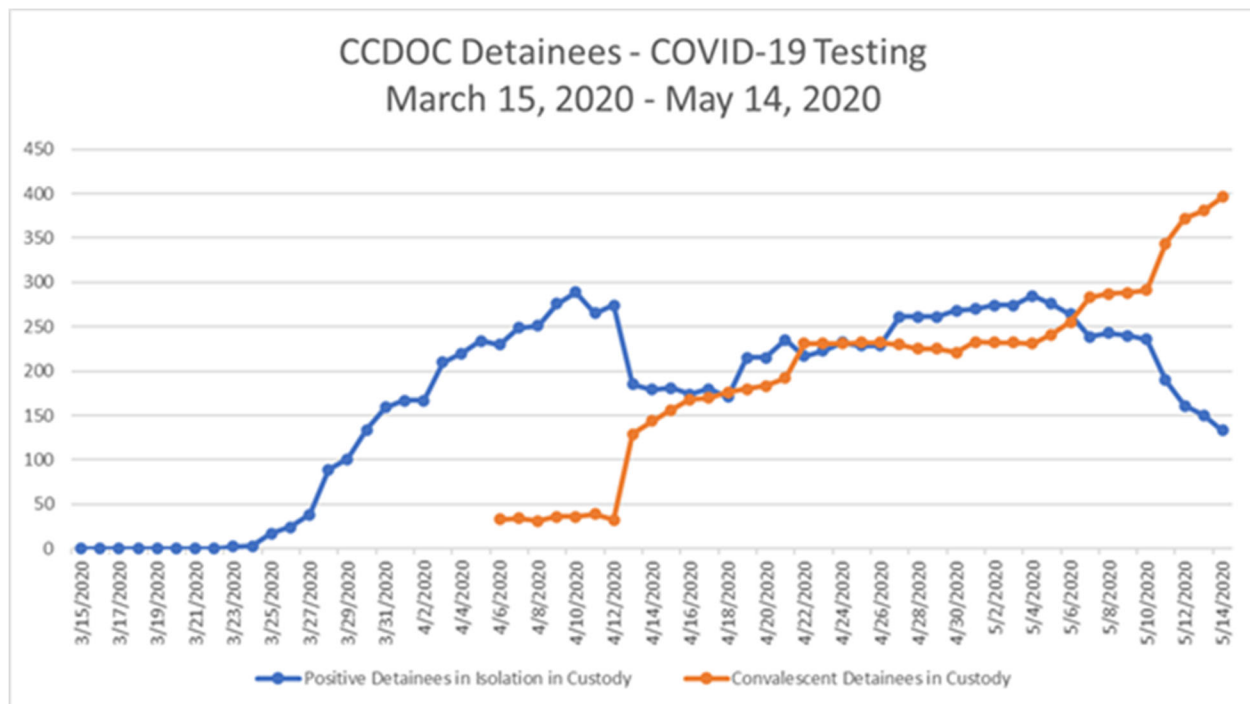
Continued efforts from all partners will be required to sustain our progress, but as the country continues to respond to COVID-19, the strategies implemented at Cook County Jail will serve as a national blueprint for congregate settings. Of course, none of this would have been possible without the commitment and dedication of many partners but most notably the employees in the Sheriff's Office and at Cermak Health Services.

"I hope that the actions we have taken will assist other correctional and congregate settings around the country as they respond to the inevitable reality that COVID-19 has required us to address," said Dr. Mennella. "This pandemic serves as a stark reminder that our walls are porous and public health concerns in the community pose an enhanced risk within the walls of a congregate setting. As such, the response must come not only from within our walls but also from the public health community at large."

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As of 5 p.m. on 05/14/2020:

- 4,057 detainees in custody at Cook County Jail
- 133 detainees in custody of the Cook County Sheriff are currently positive for COVID-19.
- 396 detainees in custody are no longer positive and are being monitored at a recovery facility at the jail.
- 1,236 detainees have tested negative for COVID-19.



Source: <https://www.cookcountysheriff.org/covid-19-cases-at-ccdoc/>